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ABSTRACT

Worldwide restricted roles based on gender and imposed by culture diminish girls' self-esteem, undermine their ambition, and limit their potential. Girls and young women move towards adulthood in social systems that negatively affect them educationally, psychologically, and physically. This paper describes "Horizons: 2000," a unique developmental program which is designed to specifically address the concerns of females today. It describes the curriculum as an educational program that focuses on enhancing females' self esteem, exploring attitudes toward women's roles in society, recognizing and confronting limitations caused by stereotypes, and exploring non-traditional career and lifeplanning choices and consequences. The developmental framework of the Horizons: 2000 curriculum is based on the career development theory of Ginzberg, Ginzberg, Axelrod, and Herma (1951) which recognized the link between vocational choices and adolescent development. The paper concludes that girls of all ages and from diverse backgrounds need programs like this to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence in order to confront and change negative cultural practices. It notes the need for educators and counselors to promote gender-equity and educational funding to implement gender-fair programs to challenge stereotypic messages girls worldwide are receiving. (Contains 14 references.) (JDM)

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Cross-Cultural Caring: Global Solutions for Empowering Females

ED 439 335

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Worldwide, girls are devalued and constrained by societal messages and customs. Restricted roles, based on gender and imposed by culture, diminish girls' self-esteem, undermine their ambition and limit their potential. Girls and young women move towards adulthood in social systems which negatively affect them educationally, psychologically and physically.

In America, females are most at risk during adolescence (Gilligan, 1982). The American Association of University Women (1991) revealed that girls emerged from adolescence "with a poor self-image, constrained views of their future place in society and much less confidence about themselves and their abilities" (AAUW, 1991, p.4). Girls start out strong academically but, marginalized in the classroom, fall behind boys by the time they graduate. Additionally, although they are more likely than males to come to school prepared to learn and participate in school activites, girls are the only cohort population who tests higher in self-esteem, achievement and aptitude before entering school than after graduating (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1995).

In high school, females read and write better than males but perform at lower levels in mathematics and science; females also are less likely to study physics (NCES). According to Sadker and Sadker (1989), girls have less confidence in their mathematical ability as the result of sex typing mathematics as a masculine discipline.

Girls of color face different expectations both in and outside of the classroom. For example, African-American girls maintain higher self-esteem than other female populations in America, but experience a greater drop in academic self esteem. This is due, in part, to lower teacher expectations. Even if they have high ability, African-American females are reinforced less and interact less with teachers than Caucasian girls. When African-American girls are positively reinforced, it is more for "correct" social behavior rather than academics (AAUW, 1991).

Drop in self-esteem and achievement between elementary and high school is even greater for Hispanic girls who enter school with the highest rates of self-esteem (Valenzuela, 1993). For many traditional Hispanic populations, the female role is more subordinate than the male, with motherhood the expected role for all women (Lips, 1997). Motherhood, as the only option, limits choices, denies economic independence to women, and lowers a family's total income.

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Female students exhibit lower self-esteem than males during both secondary and post-secondary education. Although, overall, women achieve better grades than men, they are less likely to believe they can do college work (AAUW, 1991). When women do graduate from college, they typically earn less than a male who is a high school drop out; women of color earn even less, averaging approximately 50 percent of the wages earned by white males. Moreover, female recipients comprise only 36 percent of the more than 6,000 National Merit Scholarships awarded each year to support higher education (Sadker & Sadker, 1989). Gender bias in curricula, instruction and financial support pervades American school systems (Sadker & Sadker, 1989) and takes an enormous toll on female students.

Cultural messages and customs also cause women to suffer psychologically and physically in American society. When girls reach adolescence they begin to realize that women are devalued (Perry, 1992). Sexist attitudes remain a major factor. Having been repeatedly told that they are sex objects through advertisements and the media, girls become even more subject to the usual adolescent anxieties about appearance. Today's popular specifications of "blonde and thin" impact most on girls during adolescence when there is an increase in their size and weight. Consequently, eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia continue to increase. These diseases are estimated to occur in five to ten percent of adolescent girls and young women at an average age of 11.7 years, with some patients evidencing problems as early as eight years of age (Mokbel, Hodges & Ollendick, 1992). While eating disorders have been found most frequently in middle-class, white, female adolescents in the U.S., they have also been increasing in African-American and Hispanic girls (Thompson, 1994). Society's standards of beauty are in direct conflict with the standards of beauty in their own culture. Cases of eating disorders also are steadily increasing in the developing world (Lindsey, 1997).

Additional problems for adolescent females occur since pleasing others often translates into having sex. Lacking self-esteem and self-confidence, one in ten teenage girls in America gets pregnant every year. More than 40 percent of adolescent girls who drop out of school do so because of pregnancy (Sadker & Sadker, 1989). By age 20, 44 percent of all girls in the U.S. and 63 percent of Black girls become pregnant at least once. The U.S. has one of the highest birthrates for 15 to 19 year olds among Western industrialized nations. As a result of sexual behaviors during teenage years, the rate of HIV-positive infection is growing rapidly among adolescent girls (Perry, 1992).

Psychologically, American women are twice as likely as men to experience major depression. The reasons for female depression are less biological than cultural. Menstruation, pregnancy, abortion and menopause were found to be only modestly associated with severe emotional distress (Gladwell, 1990). Poverty, unhappy marriage, reproductive stress and sexual and physical abuse are stronger factors than biology. Specifically, approximately 40% of women in the U.S. will be victims of spousal abuse at some point in their lives (Gladwell, 1990). Women are more depressed than men primarily due to their experience of being female in the American culture (Modbel, Hodges & Ollendick, 1992).

As in the United States, societal roles and restrictions throughout the world which are based on gender impede women's educational, social and psychological growth. Although there has been an increase in female literacy globally, "two-thirds of the illiterate people in the world are women and, in

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17 countries, 90 percent or more of the female population is illiterate" (Jacobsen, 1994, p. 449). "Low literacy rates have a common denominator in poverty and women's low status in the household" (Sivard, 1995, p. 21). School is often optional or considered not necessary for girls who may take on domestic responsibilities, subsistence farming or, upon marriage, move in with their husband's family. In many developing countries, schools are not located close to rural areas making it impossible to attend. Further, in more conservative cultures, parents may be unwilling to expose traditionally sheltered daughters to higher education at coeducational universities (Sivard, 1995). Practices which keep females from attaining education relegate them to low paying jobs and high unemployment, often resulting in poverty for themselves and their children. As a result, girls often have lower aspirations for their lives. Lack of education for women hurts all societies by eliminating an important resource for a productive economy.

Globally, the control of women's sexuality and violence against women in the form of spousal abuse, rape, and incest destroys self-esteem, creativity, and leaves girls and women feeling hopeless, with little belief in themselves and their own futures. Domestic abuse is considered the world's most common form of violence, brutalizing millions of women in almost every culture. It is estimated that one-fourth of the world's women are severely abused in their own homes, and although in every socioeconomic level, it is linked to poverty and lack of education (Sivard, 1995). Cultural practices like female genital mutiliation physically and psychologically affect more than 100 million young African, Asian, and Middle Eastern females (Sivard, 1995). This practice can result in hemmorhage, infections, long-term complications, obstructed labor, and even death. Societal messages and customs resulting in depression, unwanted pregnancies, drug and alcohol use, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and limited aspirations are universal women's issues confronting all contemporary societies.

HORIZONS:2000 (Bartholomew, 1993) "Career and Lifeplanning Curriculum" is a unique, developmental program which is designed specifically to address the concerns of females today (ages 10 through adult). The curriculum is an educational program which focuses on enhancing females' self esteem, exploring attitudes towards women's roles in society, recognizing and confronting limitations caused by stereotypes, and exploring non-traditional career and lifeplanning choices and consequences. The overall goal of the curriculum is to promote female wellness through the lifespan. Specific components include: cultural influences, identity formation, gender roles, mentors, networking, and lifeplanning exploration. **HORIZONS:2000** has been field tested and is currently being taught throughout the United States and in three different countries (South Africa, Canada and Australia).

The developmental framework of the **HORIZONS:2000** curriculum is based on the career development theory of Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrod and Herma (1951). Ginzberg and his associates recognized the link between vocational choices and adolescent development. They defined the career choice process in terms of three stages: Fantasy, Tentative, and Realistic.

During the Fantasy stage, **HORIZONS:2000** activities focus on self-exploration, awareness of traditional and non-traditional roles, and societal influences on both females and males. Tentative stage activites encourage students to examine personal interests, talents, abilities, attitudes toward success, and expectations for the future. Students explore a wide variety of career options and

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examine the implications of their decisions. In the final Realistic stage, students begin to crysta
heir career life and to communicate choices with their families. **HORIZONS:2000** provides r
raditional role model and mentor programs to help enhance students' awareness of traditional
ion-traditional occupations and to assist development in the practical skills needed for career an
ifeplanning.

Student worksheets are color-coded to correspond with the developmental stages through w
students progress. Fantasy, Tentative, and Realistic stages are represented by light-orange, mid-
orange, and dark-orange, respectively, with special emphasis given to the developmental needs o
female students.

In the 5th and 6th grade, communication with parents and male and female peers is emphasized
This is intended to establish a strong base and supportive network for students in order to assist th
through the more "difficult" years of adolescence. Research reveals that girls' self esteem begins t
fall substantially during the 7th and 8th grades and continues to drop thereafter (AAUW, 1991).
Thus, the focus of the 7th and 8th grade curriculum is on building students' self-esteem and
awareness of talents and abilities. In the 10th and 11th grade curriculum, non-traditional careers an
female role models are emphasized to help prevent girls from dropping out of advanced math and
science courses and thus limiting their career options and potential. Life planning and practical skill
for adulthood are emphasized in the 12th grade to help girls successfully make the transition from
school to adult life.

The author's goal is to empower young women by increasing their self-awareness and self-esteem
so they can answer the questions "Who am I?", "What do I want?", and "How do I get there?"
Upon completion of the curriculum, young women will have expanded their horizons, developed
pride in their abilities and learned the skills with which to command their future.

Girls of all ages, from diverse backgrounds, need programs like **HORIZONS:2000** to develop
their self-esteem and self-confidence in order to confront and change negative, cultural practices. As
educators and counselors, we must promote gender-equity and provide educational funding to im-
plement gender-fair programs to challenge stereotypic messages which are projected throughout
much of the world. By challenging gender stereotypes, counselors and teachers can influence the
ways in which schools deliver education and ensure gender-equal treatment of students.

Educating and empowering females, across all cultures, will result in confident young women
who have a clear vision for their future. Eliminating restrictive societal roles will enable women to
utilize their skills and abilities, participate productively in a global, technological age, and make
positive contributions to society.

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